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Narcissistic Rage and Neoliberal Reproduction

Combining political economy and depth psychology, this article seeks to elucidate the socio-psychical underpinnings of neoliberalism's resilience following the global financial crisis. In explicating neoliberalism's reproduction, the analysis employs self psychologist Heinz Kohut's theorisation of narcissistic development. Kohut conceives narcissism as a normal condition driving self-formation, but claims that obstructions in its development result in impaired self-esteem and self-confidence, a lack of empathy and aggression against others and the self. The article argues that neoliberalism fosters and is reinforced by narcissistic configurations that impede the attainment of a more stable sense of self. The inability to attain narcissistic fulfilment through neoliberal sociality contributes to defensive and compensatory reactions that entrench neoliberalism's logic and, through economic performativity, manifest in what Kohut termed narcissistic rage. As an exemplar of this phenomenon, the article examines the emergence of popular neoliberalism in the form of the Tea Party.

Introduction

On the heels of the global financial crisis, beliefs abounded that Western economies were emerging from the penumbra of neoliberalism. While some commentators cautiously evaluated the aftermath, others quickly declared neoliberalism in its death throes, putting paid to a thirty-year global free market project. The addled responses of some of neoliberalism's stalwarts fuelled such beliefs. Former Federal Chairman Alan Greenspan's plaintive admission of the "flaw" in his model of competitive markets suggested not just a miscalibration, but an epistemic crisis. A shifting consensus was apparent, with talk of the return of Keynes accompanying government stimulus packages and bailouts for failing firms. Some scholars, drawing on Karl Polanyi's work, hinted at an impending double movement, a political counter-movement that would foster re-regulation, decommodification and the re-embedding of the market.¹

¹ Robert Wade, "Financial Regime Change?", *New Left Review*, Vol. 53 (2008), p. 188; Barry Gills, "The Swinging of the Pendulum: The Global Crisis and Beyond", *Globalizations*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (2008), pp. 513-22.

The moment was ephemeral. Scholarly focus shifted to the drive for austerity and neoliberalism's persistence. The puzzle was not simply neoliberalism's survival, but its flourishing. Harvey declared neoliberalism, a project he saw as restoring and consolidating class power, in rude health.² Crouch viewed neoliberalism, defined as public life's dominance by the "giant corporation", strengthened with the crisis.³ The state, rather than curtailing the market's remit, made accommodations to these firms. Mirowski argued the "Neoliberal Thought Collective", through a series of manoeuvres and long-term strategies, fortified its ascendancy and further delegitimised the left.⁴ These manoeuvres and strategies included "industrial-scale manufacture of ignorance about the crisis", the erection of cultural infrastructure promoting everyday neoliberalism, the imposition of state-sponsored markets to "rescue" the economy, and advocacy for blue-sky financial innovation as the panacea for economic stagnation. Further, Mirowski claimed, cognitive dissonance about the crisis contributed to the entrenchment of beliefs in the market's efficacy.⁵

Making sense of the enduring faith in the market, several scholars have focused on the sphere of everyday life. Two overlapping approaches to everyday political economy finding purchase in explaining the reproduction of neoliberal sociality are: 1) the social studies of finance literature, drawing on anthropology, geography and sociology, and 2) Foucauldian-influenced political economy.

The social studies of finance literature investigates the "performance" or "performativity" of economic life, a phenomenon that helps to explain aspects of neoliberalism's endurance. Paraphrasing Callon, economics and the social sciences, as well as professionals of the market, do not merely observe and react to the economy, but perform, shape and format it.⁶ Donald MacKenzie, drawing on philosopher J.L. Austin's concept of "the performative", in which the issuance of an utterance entails its performance, outlines how financial markets are shaped by

² David Harvey, "The Crisis and the Consolidation of Class Power: Is This Really the End of Neoliberalism?", *CounterPunch*, available: <<http://www.counterpunch.org/2009/03/13/is-this-really-the-end-of-neoliberalism/>> (accessed 21 May 2015).

³ Colin Crouch, *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

⁴ Philip Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown* (London: Verso, 2013).

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 356-57.

⁶ Michel Callon, "Introduction: the embeddedness of economic markets in economics", in Michel Callon (ed.), *The Laws of the Markets* (Oxford: Blackwell/The Sociological Review, 1998), pp. 1-57.

economic theory's self-fulfilling nature. Epitomising this, he traces the diffusion of the Black-Scholes-Merton option-pricing theory, a methodology for pricing derivatives. The model gained verisimilitude because it informed the practices of traders, creating patterns in prices as the model described.⁷ Such performances not only entail doing things in a manner that leads models to become self-fulfilling, but also filter out aspects of the present reality at odds with the models.

Employing notions of performativity, Brassett and Clarke help to account for the limited change subsequent to the financial crisis. They note how the sub-prime crisis was constituted like a natural disaster, with frequent references to a “financial tsunami”, and financial subjects portrayed as passive victims lacking political agency. This performance legitimised conservative managerial interventions that would return things back to “normal”, naturalising previous practices of finance, which were presented as “momentarily” disrupted by a few greedy, reckless bankers. These utterances disavowed alternative social configurations of finance.⁸

Foucauldian-inspired scholars localise neoliberalism's inertia in historically particular manifestations of selfhood. Several utilise Foucault's concept of governmentality, the conduct of conducts, to elucidate the emergence and reproduction of self-regulating subjects who animate markets. Foucault attributed to neoliberalism a specific variant of *homo economicus* as “an entrepreneur of himself”.⁹ Rose further articulated this notion of the “entrepreneurial self”, tracing how this form of neoliberal governmentality, emphasising the maximisation of choice and self-expression, delegitimised beliefs in authorities' ability to administer their subjects' wellbeing.¹⁰ Drawing on governmentality studies, Langley maps the constitution of new financial identities, particularly the remaking of financial subjects in terms of saving and borrowing. He details the rise of financial subjects he coins the “revolvers” of credit card networks, individuals for whom the self-discipline of thrift and prudence have been replaced with a self-discipline of meeting, managing and manipulating extended borrowing. For revolvers,

⁷ Donald MacKenzie, *An Engine Not a Camera: How Financial Models Shape Markets* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

⁸ James Brassett and Chris Clarke, "Performing the Sub-Prime Crisis: Trauma and the Financial Event", *International Political Sociology*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2012), pp. 4-20.

⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) p. 226.

¹⁰ Nikolas Rose, "Governing the enterprising self", in Paul Heelas and Paul Morris (eds.), *The values of enterprise culture: The moral debate* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 141-64; Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Routledge, 1990).

being responsible borrowers, maintaining credit lines and good credit scores, is not simply a result of fear of discipline, but of aspirations for freedom and security.¹¹ Dovetailing with Langley, Payne documents how the imagined figure of the consumer became a governing mentality, with consumption conceived as a form of self-investment. The consumer-as-entrepreneur was fashioned as a sovereign agent driving civilisational progress, pressuring firms and governments.¹² This mentality helped subvert Keynesian techniques of economic governance.

In both approaches to everyday political economy, a factor sometimes mentioned, but under-theorised, is the role of affect in the reproduction of neoliberal subjectivities. When analyses of economic performativity consider emotions, they tend to treat them as part of a performance. For example, Brassett and Clarke highlight the use of traumatic imagery in presenting the global financial crisis.¹³ Yet a fuller theorisation of how emotions are constitutive and influenced by performativity is lacking. Somewhat differently, but still inadequately, the governmentality literature acknowledges emotions' role in constituting self-regulating subjects, but does not venture into psychodynamics.¹⁴ Emotions are elicited, corralled and repressed by governmental technologies, but the psychical economy of the individual remains opaque. Emotions play a functional role without prediscursive content.

Conceptualising the role of emotion in neoliberalism's reproduction and addressing the lack of a psychodynamic theorisation, this article turns to the self psychology of Heinz Kohut.¹⁵

¹¹ Paul Langley, *The Everyday Life of Global Finance: Saving and Borrowing in Anglo-America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹² Christopher Payne, *The Consumer, Credit and Neoliberalism: Governing the Modern Economy* (London: Routledge, 2012).

¹³ Brassett and Clarke, "Performing the Sub-Prime", op. cit.

¹⁴ Langley explores governance apparatuses employed to create an "affective atmosphere of confidence". See Paul Langley, *Liquidity Lost: The Governance of the Global Financial Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Kiersey investigates "affective subjectification", the managing and shaping of subjects' emotional valorisations, in the post-crisis era. He looks at how reality TV in Ireland contributed to subjects' reinvestment in an emotionally and financially oppressive regime of valorisation. See Nicholas Kiersey, "'Retail Therapy in the Dragon's Den': Neoliberalism and Affective Labour in the Popular Culture of Ireland's Financial Crisis", *Global Society*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2014), pp. 356-74.

¹⁵ For earlier work exploring the psychodynamics of political economy, what has been referred to as 'libidinal political economy', see Earl Gammon and Ronen Palan, "Libidinal International Political Economy", in Marieke De Goede (ed.), *International Political Economy and Poststructural Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 97-114; Angus Cameron,

Neoliberalism, here, is understood less as an ideological project, or simply market rule, and more as a series of technologies of governance that seek to engineer competition, especially through individuation and responsabilisation.¹⁶ The article draws on Kohut's distinctive conception of narcissism, viewed as a normal, non-pathological course of psychological development, to understand the socio-psychical dimensions of neoliberalism's resilience. Kohut's theorisation of narcissism, derived from Freud's treatment of the subject, contrasts with the judgmental tone of his contemporaries such as Christopher Lasch.¹⁷ Kohut's analytic approach allows us to go beyond accounts of neoliberalism's persistence that suggest a type of cognitive dissonance, showing how neoliberalism fosters and reinforces narcissistic configurations that impede attainment of a more stable sense of self. It is argued that the inability to attain narcissistic fulfilment in neoliberal sociality contributes to defensive and compensatory reactions that entrench its logic, manifesting, through economic performativity, in the phenomenon Kohut termed narcissistic rage.

The article joins recent scholarship exploring the affective dynamics of neoliberalism's persistence. Berlant develops the psychoanalytically-informed concept of "cruel optimism" to explain self-harming attachments seen with neoliberal subjectivities. As she elaborates, attachments we form to objects, be they people, political institutions, or aesthetics, are imbued with optimism; they promise continuity within our lives and optimism about living.¹⁸ Attachments to these objects, such as the "good life", can have deleterious effects, diminishing our potential to flourish. Fear of losing these objects can be paralyzing, subjecting us to cruelty. The "very vitalizing or animating potency of an object/scene of desire contributes to the attrition of the very thriving that is supposed to be made possible in the work of attachment in the first place."¹⁹

Anastasia Nesvetailova and Ronen Palan, "Wages of Sin?", *Journal of Cultural Economy*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2011), pp. 117-35

¹⁶ Samuel Knafo, Sahil Dutta, Matthieu Hughes, Richard Lane and Steffan Wyn-Jones, "Re-assembling Neoliberalism: On the Managerial Roots of Neoliberal Governance," Unpublished Manuscript (Brighton: University of Sussex, 2015).

¹⁷ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978).

¹⁸ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Lauren Berlant, "Cruel Optimism", *differences*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2006), pp. 20-36.

¹⁹ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, op. cit., p. 25.

Konings theorises and charts how the emotional needs of the social self had evolved by the 1970s such that neoliberalism fed the affective demands of late capitalism's subjects.²⁰ Rather than animated by hedonistic self-absorption, as judged by some social commentators²¹, Konings argues that neoliberalism is driven by the promise of self-purification through secularised faith in the icon of money. This faith is not of an idolatrous sort, a base love of money, but one that fosters a unique relationship with the economy where one receives purifying effects through a “redemptive austerity”. Taking personal responsibility, accepting the discipline of money—not worshipping it—offers promises of self-coherency. Konings suggests that in abiding money's discipline, it—at least ephemerally—quells anxiety that springs from relative powerlessness, and negates responsibility for the injuries that befall those who transgress its logic. His treatment affords an emotional complexity to neoliberal selfhood lacking in contemporary critical scholarship, which inadequately grasps the affective economy in which neoliberalism is embedded.

Kohut's theorisation of narcissistic development lends greater psychological depth to notions such as “cruel optimism” and “redemptive austerity” that Berlant and Konings advance. It shows how these phenomena arise as a result of a type of narcissistic wound inflicted under historically particular conditions of neoliberal selfhood.

The article divides into three main sections. The first lays out Kohut's theory of narcissistic development and self-maturation. It describes how individuals develop selfobjects, objects experienced as part of the self, helping them to maintain a sense of self-coherency. It outlines two broad types of selfobjects—mirroring and idealising—which individuals use to structure and consolidate the self in response to underlying narcissistic needs. It also explains the transformations and frustrations of narcissism that occur in the course of psychological maturation. The second section applies Kohutian self psychology to economic performativity. It moves beyond instrumentalist accounts of economic practice, showing how narcissistic demands contribute to non-rational behaviour in the economic sphere. The third section focuses on social circumstances reinforcing everyday neoliberalism, despite its failure to deliver narcissistic fulfilment. In particular, the section looks at the Tea Party movement as a manifestation of

²⁰ Martijn Konings, *The Emotional Logic of Capitalism: What Progressives Have Missed* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).

²¹ For example, see Lasch, *Culture of Narcissism*, op. cit.

popular neoliberalism that effectively thwarts efforts to constrain market logics and competitive discipline. It is argued neoliberal selfhood contributes to a condition of narcissistic rage, exacerbating vulnerabilities, in turn entrenching aggressive neoliberal practices. Understanding the narcissistic conflicts sustaining neoliberalism's reproduction, the article concludes, offers insights into reversing its course.

Kohut, Narcissism and the Self

The therapeutic approach of Kohut's self psychology aimed to help individuals develop more coherent selves capable of negotiating reality. Essential to this was empathy, "the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person", to elucidate the narcissistic needs impelling individuals. His approach sought to locate the disruptions to narcissistic fulfilment, disruptions preventing narcissism's expression in healthier, more socially sustainable forms.

Kohut's view of narcissism diverged from its conception as an early stage of psychical life, superseded with subjects' recognition of the external world. For Freud, narcissism was a primary condition characteristic of infancy, an "oceanic feeling", a feeling of the self as limitless, omnipotent and omniscient.²² Subsequently, due to early frustrations, especially unmet expectations from its caregivers, an infant begins constituting its self as an object separate from the external world. This self-investment Freud referred to as the narcissistic stage.²³ Subsequent to this stage is the object stage, when a child invests in objects beyond the pale of the self, when other persons are invested as totalised, independent objects.²⁴ For Kohut, though, psychological maturation does not extinguish narcissism, but transforms it into higher forms. Here, he drew on Freud's acknowledgement that "narcissistic organization is never wholly abandoned", and that "a

²² Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents", in James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson (eds.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 21 (London: Hogarth, 1961), p. 72.

²³ Sigmund Freud, "Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Part III", in James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson (eds.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 16 (London: Hogarth, 1963), pp. 243-476; Sigmund Freud, "Instincts and their Vicissitudes", in James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson (eds.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 14 (London: Hogarth, 1957), pp. 109-40.

²⁴ Andre Green, *The Fabric of Affect in the Psychoanalytic Discourse* (London: Routledge, 1999).

human being remains to some extent narcissistic even after he has found external objects for his libido.”²⁵

Kohut’s therapeutic goal was channeling narcissism into socially beneficial forms capable of conferring self-esteem and self-confidence, not to quell it. Rather than pathological, he saw narcissism as defensive, covering over self-defects, and compensatory, making up for them. Narcissism attempts to maintain self-unity against incessant threats of dissolution presented by reality. Transformed narcissism, moving away from grandiose self-conceptions, could become the basis for valued sociocultural attributes including empathy, creativity, humour and wisdom.²⁶ This occurs through the optimal frustration of narcissistic needs, that is, of transmuting the desire for admiration into substitutive satisfactions. This contrasts with traumatic frustration, which thwarts such needs being met. Exemplifying optimal frustration is when a caregiver meets a child’s impulses with a responsive and supportive attitude, not counter-aggression, steering them towards behaviours that are deemed to be more socially acceptable. The reaction to impulses with aggression, though, can contribute to the child meeting its own future needs for narcissistic fulfilment with aggression.²⁷

Fundamental in a child’s development is a process Kohut termed mirroring, where others, especially caregivers, reflect back the burgeoning self. Mirroring reaffirms the subject, allowing them to feel valued in the eyes of others. Individuals who play this role nurturing and sustaining the early self are what Kohut termed mirroring selfobjects. Selfobjects are objects still largely experienced as part of the self. The control a child expects to exert over its selfobjects is akin to that which an adult expects over its own body and mind.²⁸ Mirroring allows the transformation of what Kohut called the grandiose self, similar to Freud’s conception of the self during the narcissistic stage, into a self with mature ambition. Without sufficient mirroring acceptance from

²⁵ Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo", in James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson (eds.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 13 (London: Hogarth, 1955), p. 89.

²⁶ Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders* (London: Hogarth Press, 1971) p. 299.

²⁷ Heinz Kohut and Philip Seitz, "Concepts and Theories of Psychoanalysis", in Paul Ornstein (ed.), *The Search for the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut: 1950-1978*, Vol. 1 (London: Karnac, 2011), p. 307.

²⁸ Heinz Kohut and Ernest Wolf, "The Disorders of the Self and Their Treatment: An Outline", in Paul Ornstein (ed.), *The Search for the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut: 1978-1981*, Vol. 3 (London: Karnac, 2011), p. 361.

selfobjects, though, narcissistic demands lack support to be transmuted into more realistic expressions; the unaltered grandiose self is repressed or disavowed, and cannot be mobilised into practicable forms of personal development.

Selfobjects also contribute to self-development through the process of idealisation. Idealised selfobjects brace the self and defend against narcissistic injury as a child confronts its limitations. Onto these selfobjects a child projects its lost perfection, and recovers it, vicariously, by merging with them. Struggling with its vulnerability, and confronted by an uncooperative world, the merger with caregivers provides compensatory structures that satiate narcissistic needs. Failure to merge with idealised selfobjects because of rejection, or because the frailties of selfobjects are exposed, can threaten the emerging self's cohesion. Unsuccessful idealisation can contribute to listlessness, with a dearth of objects beyond the self to correct for its defects. As Jacoby explains, "transpersonal aims or ideals do not exert a vital attraction and are not able to compensate meaningfully for the sense of inner emptiness that affects many narcissistically wounded patients."²⁹

Relations with mirroring and idealising selfobjects define the poles of Kohut's conception of the bipolar self (Figure 1). On one pole, mirroring selfobjects aid the development of positive self-esteem and self-confidence. On the other, idealising selfobjects allow the self to develop and sustain healthy admiration for others, and maintain enthusiasm for the world. There is continual oscillation between the poles, and they can pull the self in different directions.

²⁹ Mario Jacoby, *Individuation and Narcissism: The Psychology of Self in Jung and Kohut* (London: Routledge, 1990) p. 183.

The Bipolar Self

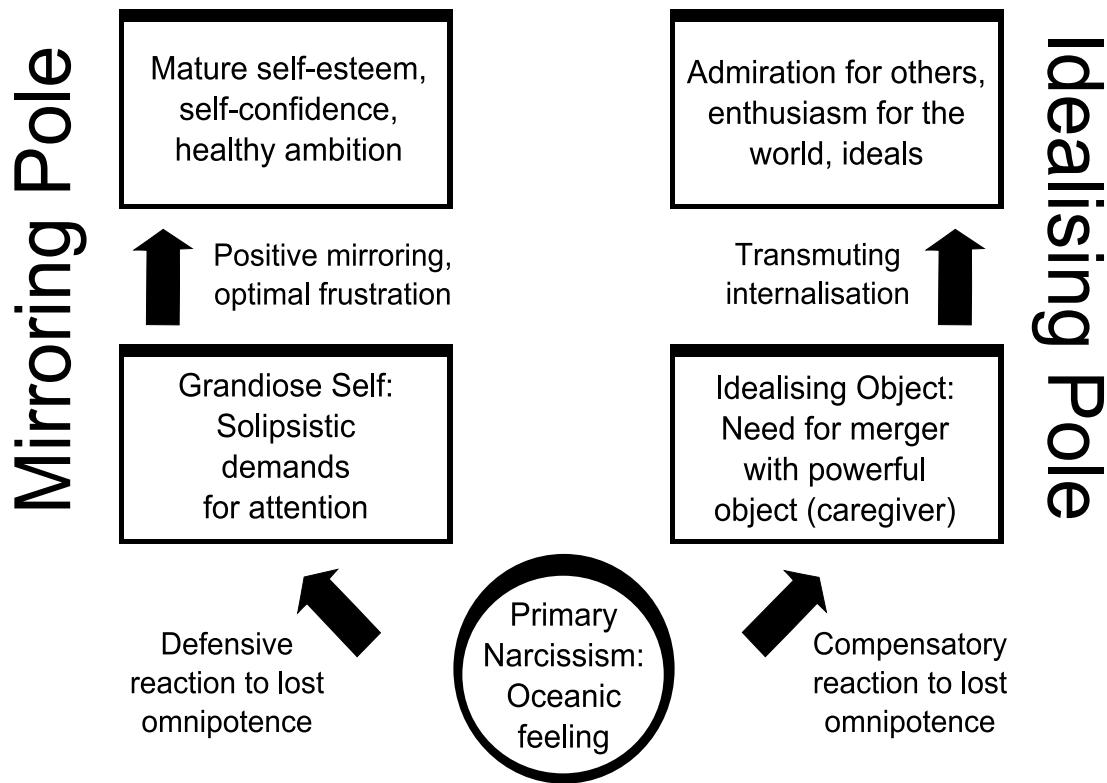


Figure 1. The narcissistic development of the bipolar self ³⁰

The bipolar self continually evolves, experiencing vicissitudes and regressions with life's contingencies and frustrations. Mirroring selfobjects help to dissolve the grandiose self's defensive structure, leading to a more cohesive self. But at times of faltering self-confidence, there can be a regression towards grandiosity. Following significant narcissistic injury, individuals may retreat to earlier defensive configurations. Unable to attain narcissistic fulfilment by engaging with the world, individuals may withdraw, falling into a more solipsistic state. Along the idealising pole, the narcissistic configuration is transformed as the child gradually recognises its selfobjects' imperfection. In a non-traumatic setting a child internalises values and ideals projected onto selfobjects. Kohut explains that the neutralising, drive-controlling and drive-channeling functions performed through the merger with idealised selfobjects are increasingly performed autonomously. Internalised values are integrated into the superego,

³⁰ Based on Kohut, *Analysis of the Self*, op. cit., p. 9; Allen Siegel, *Heinz Kohut and the Psychology of the Self* (London: Routledge, 1996) p. 68.

serving as a beacon throughout one's lifetime.³¹ Following narcissistic injury, though, individuals may seek to merge with others to compensate for faltering self-control and cohesion.

"Narcissistic disequilibrium", as occurs with faulty mirroring, can precipitate strong affective reactions. Non-cooperative mirroring selfobjects that deny empathic outlet for exhibitionistic impulses can result in repression of these urges, producing feelings of shame or mortification. Shame, for Kohut, results from the grandiose self overflowing the ego's regulative/neutralising capacities.³² Another related, affective response is narcissistic rage and destructiveness, a particular manifestation of aggression in response to narcissistic injury. The loss of self-esteem precipitates a defensive reaction through rage. Kohut characterises narcissistic rage as a "need for revenge, for righting a wrong, for undoing a hurt by whatever means, and a deeply anchored, unrelenting compulsion in the pursuit of all these aims."³³ Those retaining archaic narcissistic configurations (the grandiose self and unrealistic idealisations) are prone to more severe reactions, demanding full control over their mirroring selfobjects and the omnipotence of their idealised selfobjects.³⁴ Narcissistic rage aims at obliterating those objects that belie a subject's expansive sense of self. This narcissistic rage, resulting from the shame of lacking control, can fuel self-destructive behaviours.

Kohut's understanding of the bipolar self and the development of narcissistic configurations contributed to an emphasis on empathy to his approach. Empathy, not to be confused with sympathy or compassion, is a mode of cognition allowing recognition of ourselves in another. It is a value-neutral form of observation, a "vicarious introspection" that permits us to grasp narcissistic demands we ourselves experience operating within another.³⁵ Empathy allows understanding narcissism in a non-hypocritical manner, avoiding a pathological or pejorative view of narcissism. It enables us to help others to transmute their narcissistic configurations into more mature, stable forms. Just as it is important for caregivers to respond with empathy to a

³¹ Kohut, *Analysis of the Self*, op. cit., pp. 298-99.

³² Ibid., p. 181.

³³ Heinz Kohut, "Thoughts on Narcissism and Narcissistic Rage", in Paul Ornstein (ed.), *The Search for the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut: 1950-1978*, Vol. 2 (London: Karnac, 2011), pp. 637-38.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 644.

³⁵ Heinz Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis: An Examination of the Relationship Between Mode of Observation and Theory", in *The Search for the Self*, Vol. 1, op. cit., pp. 205-35; Heinz Kohut, "Reflections on Advances in Self Psychology", in *The Search for the Self*, Vol. 3, op. cit., pp. 261-357.

child's grandiose demands, so too, empathy for a patient's grandiosity and aggression is vital in a therapeutic setting.

Empathy is not just a method for comprehending psychodynamics, but an inclination necessary for psychological survival. Kohut argues that our ability to empathise is "laid by the fact that in our earliest mental organization the feelings, actions, and behavior of the mother had been included in our self."³⁶ It is "human empathy, as we mirror and confirm the other and as the other confirms and mirrors us, that buttresses an enclave of human meaning."³⁷ Empathy allows us to direct narcissism towards positive ends, fostering its progressive neutralisation and integration. Mature empathy, where the boundedness of the self is recognised, represents advancement in the progressive neutralisation of grandiose narcissism.

Ultimately, depth psychology and Kohut's empathic approach to narcissism offer insights into issues confronting social groups as their members seek narcissistic fulfilment, and are relevant to fields such as international relations and global political economy. Depth psychology, Lapping argues, with its intense observation of individuals' psychical structuring, provides theoretical and methodological tools for conceptualising relations between human subjects and their social environment, the very aim of social and political theory.³⁸ Kohut's conceptualisation of self development is immanently social and offers promise in understanding broader socio-psychical dynamics. Though largely focusing on the narcissistic tensions of individuals, Kohut³⁹ argued that depth psychology could be applied to understanding group psychology, providing explanations of historical and social phenomena.⁴⁰ In his late work, he suggested the analogous functioning of narcissism at the level of groups, with group behaviour and cohesion shaped by collective narcissistic configurations. In particular, he claimed that 'cultural selfobjects' played a

³⁶ Heinz Kohut, "Forms and Transformations of the Self", in *The Search for the Self*, Vol. 1, op. cit., p. 451.

³⁷ Heinz Kohut, "The Future of Psychoanalysis", in *The Search for the Self*, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 682.

³⁸ Claudia Lapping, *Psychoanalysis in Social Research: Shifting Theories and Reframing Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2011).

³⁹ Heinz Kohut, "Creativeness, Charisma, Group Psychology: Reflections on the Self-Analysis of Freud", in Charles Strozier (ed.), *Self Psychology and the Humanities: Reflections on a New Psychoanalytic Approach* (London: W. W. Norton, 1985), pp. pp. 205-08.

⁴⁰ Wendt, in his constructivist approach, cites Kohut in conceptualising the state as a "group Self". See Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p. 223.

role for groups similar to selfobjects for individuals, preventing fragmentation and transforming narcissism.⁴¹ Thus, beyond a clinical setting, Kohutian theory indicates ways for conceptualising the affective economies that regulate and modulate the emotions of social groups. We can begin to comprehend the techniques groups employ to transform their members' narcissistic configurations. It grants fuller appreciation of the difficulties in providing narcissistic fulfilment for group constituents, and of the aggression and idealisations resulting when paths to healthy narcissistic transformation are obstructed.

Narcissism and Political Economy

At first glance, Kohut's conception of narcissism can appear correspondent with notions of self-interest foundational to many explanations of economic motivation. It could be mistaken as confirmation of the rationality postulate, whereby individuals operate on the basis of hedonic optimisation. Hastily, narcissism might be taken to support ideas of innate greed, leading individuals to compete to attain confirmation of their grandiosity.

Kohut's conception of narcissism, though, does not offer a positivistic basis for explaining instrumental self-interest in market-based civil society. Though his theorisation allows interpreting narcissistic tensions within market society, the market is a historically contingent social institution. Self-interest is also contextually-specific; it is a tautology, defined by whatever individuals and groups claim it to be at a historical juncture.⁴² How societies transmute narcissism, the social practices and compensatory idealisations devised to provide narcissistic equilibrium, cannot be directly causally linked to narcissism. It is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition. The rituals and modes of comportment enacted by social groups, including market-based exchange, though fuelled by narcissistic demands, are irreducible to a methodologically individualist framework. History demonstrates a plurality of culturally specific practices for regulating emotional life, affective technologies, that, to varying degrees, stabilise a society's narcissistic demands. Rapid social change can be linked to periods of pervasive narcissistic injury, but such injury is not a predictor of emergent social configurations.

⁴¹ Heinz Kohut, "*On the Continuity of the Self and Cultural Selfobjects*", in *Self Psychology and the Humanities*, op. cit., pp. 232-43.

⁴² Peter Gay, *Freud for Historians* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1985).

The drive for narcissistic fulfilment can, and often does, contribute to behaviour that belies an innate propensity for pleasure optimisation. Life frequently presents individuals with materially beneficial choices they forgo because these choices contravene deeply held conceptions of self. We think of situations of self-sacrifice, undertaken without anticipation of future reward, as means of preserving self identity. Though we would not generally see a person who forgoes the last seat on a lifeboat as narcissistic, we can interpret this act as driven by demands to maintain the self's integrity, even when faced with death. In response to narcissistic injuries, individuals and social groups can undertake behaviour that produces hardship and pain, though less arduous options are available. These situations cannot be squared with a parsimonious psychology of acquisitiveness, nor be treated as exceptional. Narcissistic injuries can induce high levels of rage that precipitate extreme actions by individuals to exact revenge on those objects that imperil their self cohesion. Shamed individuals can wage emotionally and materially costly campaigns of vengeance against offending selfobjects. An example is a prolonged grudge that is mentally and financially taxing. Narcissistic rage may precipitate the use of violence in situations where it will likely meet with equal, if not greater, counter-violence.

One of the severest responses to narcissistic disequilibrium is suicide. In certain instances it can be interpreted as revenge against others through self-destruction, an extreme manifestation of narcissistic rage. Some suicides can be understood as acts to preserve the grandiose self in a milieu devoid of positive mirroring. Martyrdom is a particular form of suicide that provides the ultimate foreclosure of a grandiose self-image.

Importantly, in arguing that narcissistic fulfilment is distinct from instrumental self-interest, it is essential to stress that the former is not a state of bliss. Narcissistic fulfilment is unlike a consummatory pleasure. It is better understood as a condition of psychological stasis. The social contortions individuals endure, the complex rituals they observe, offer scant pleasure, but sustain the possibility of psychological repose. The "reward" of undertaking such behaviours is in putting the integral self beyond potential harm. Kohut speaks of a hero's valiant death as the act through which their narcissistic fulfilment attains permanence, its triumph becomes absolute.⁴³ To a lesser degree, performing duty confers psychological stasis rather than pleasure, helping to avoid psychological perturbation.

⁴³ Heinz Kohut, "On Courage", in *The Search for the Self*, Vol. 3, op. cit., p. 167.

For political economy, moving beyond the pleasure principle, appreciating the role of narcissistic drives, economic sociality assumes a distinct appearance. Exchange and production take on non-pecuniary dimensions, showing themselves not just as means through which to secure the necessities of existence, but as affective technologies that help to stabilise narcissistic demands. Exchange and production become seen as processes involving the mirroring and idealising poles. Economic performances provide opportunities to receive positive mirroring from others in our social ambit. Success in exchange and production can help to meet important self-needs, reinforcing one's identity as industrious, hard-working, prudent and honest. On the idealising pole, through production and exchange individuals can merge with something larger than themselves, examples being class, community, family and nation. As discussed later, underpinning popular neoliberalism is a strong producerist worldview driven by such mirroring and idealising needs.

Supportive of this idea of market rationalities impelled by narcissistic demands is Weber's conception of the "spirit of capitalism" arising from Calvinist beliefs. The doctrine of predestination, for its reformed Protestant adherents, was an enduring source of anxiety regarding their personal salvation, and a continuing threat to their narcissistic integrity. The only means of proving their membership within the *electi*—confirming their *certitudo salutis*—was engagement in intense worldly activity. "It and it alone disperses religious doubts and gives the certainty of grace."⁴⁴ Narcissistic demands, thus, fuelled worldly asceticism, the dedication to productive pursuits combined with frugality and sobriety, in turn creating auspicious conditions for accumulation. Calvinists' vocational success helped to satisfy mirroring needs, assuaging self-doubt and boosting self-confidence, while also meeting idealising needs through the merger with God's cosmic plan.

Importantly, austerity and efficiency also became ways of establishing discipline not only over the self, but to cement the obedience of potentially rebellious selfobjects. The Protestant ethic entails mastery over one's body and the external world. High levels of self-control act as a means of other-control. One's own temperance sets standards of conduct that others must abide if they are to receive mirroring support. Exercising diligent self-control also justifies passing judgment on others' "inferior" moral conduct. Belying conventional wisdom that links

⁴⁴ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2001) p. 67.

Puritanism via capitalism to liberal democracy and free civil society is an affinity with social authoritarianism.⁴⁵

Worldly Puritan asceticism suggests a level of chronic narcissistic rage expressed through austerity and productivity. Paraphrasing Tawney, Zafirovski claims that mastery-bound Puritans aim to make life for others “hell in this world”. Puritan asceticism creates “perpetual suffering in society and cruel and inhuman punishment for sins-crimes, essentially original sin for which humans are punished and expiate permanently.”⁴⁶ Engagement in seemingly rational action bears hallmarks of an inability to transmute grandiosity and successfully merge with idealisations. The unbearable uncertainty of salvation fuels vindictiveness. Production and austerity serve not the ends of delayed gratification, either in this world or the next, but of enforcing an arduous regime of self-discipline that inflicts suffering on themselves and others.

Casting a more anthropological gaze on modern economics’ machinations, we begin discerning the complex of narcissistic configurations enacted to structure the self in advanced capitalism. Far from serving an innate rationality, we see the complex interaction of the social roles individuals perform in their attempts to maintain narcissistic equilibrium. The seemingly base expedients of exchange and production are products of a second-order social reality, habituated processes for the attainment of narcissistic balance.

Exemplifying this is the way occupational or vocational identity aids in acquiring narcissistic fulfilment, an identity irreducible to narrow economic imperatives. From an early age, through play, children imagine their role in social production, often with little regard to remunerative rewards. Developmental psychologist Erik Erikson argues that a key source of anxiety for Western adolescents springs from concerns about their protean role in production, from their inability to settle on an occupational identity. At this stage, their ego formation revolves around their entry into the world of production, of the formation of an occupational identity by which they will be perceived by others. Through their occupation they will acquire an “inner sameness and continuity of one’s meaning for others.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Milan Zafirovski, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Authoritarianism: Puritanism, Democracy, and Society* (New York, NY: Springer, 2007).

⁴⁶ Milan Zafirovski, "Protestantism and Authoritarianism: Weber’s Secondary Problem", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2010), p. 167.

⁴⁷ Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (London: Paladin Books, 1977) p. 235.

The symbolism of possessions, varying substantially between cultures and historical epochs, is another significant aspect of identity formation that eludes explanation by parsimonious hedonic psychologies. Possessions are selfobjects that buoy self-esteem, a way to attain a modicum of psychical stasis. We see this in children's attachments with particular toys, such as a worn out doll, that do not correspond with their material value. Possessions' role as selfobjects, even through adulthood, helps in externally regulating internal psychical states. The use of possessions for extending the self, practiced in all cultures, Belk suggests, is not unhealthy; Livingston, in fact, argues that the repression of consumption for the sake of endless deferred gratification can be dangerous to psychological wellbeing.⁴⁸ Possessions "help us manipulate our possibilities and present the self in a way that garners feedback from others who are reluctant to respond so openly to the unextended self."⁴⁹ We can consider an item of clothing, model of automobile or pet, which can provide the basis for rapport and identification with strangers. Fitting with the narcissistic drive for self cohesion, Belk writes that the "accumulation of possessions provides a sense of past and tells us who we are, where we have come from, and perhaps where we are going."⁵⁰

One's relationship to possessions, though, can be symptomatic of narcissistic injury or vulnerability, and, consequently, narcissistic rage. The modern phenomenon of compulsive hoarding is indicative of attempts to prop up a fragile self through stabilising external objects. It can be simultaneously seen as an expression of narcissistic rage, whereby individuals use external objects to gain autonomy and buffer themselves from a shunned world. Exemplifying this is the famous case in 1940s Manhattan of the Collyer brothers, who scavenged materials from the streets to fortify their home and construct an intricate network of booby-trapped tunnels.⁵¹ Both brothers were discovered dead, entombed within their warren of rubbish. Veblen explored the development of consumption and ownership as expressions of a predatory drive. Conspicuous consumption served to display one's higher social status and create invidious distinctions. Overriding any innate pleasure, we see conspicuous consumption defending the

⁴⁸ James Livingston, *Against Thrift: Why Consumer Culture Is Good for the Economy, the Environment, and Your Soul* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011).

⁴⁹ Russell Belk, "Possessions and the Extended Self", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1988), p. 159.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 160.

⁵¹ Fred Penzel, "Hoarding in History", in Randy O. Frost and Gail Steketee (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Hoarding and Acquiring* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 6-16.

grandiose self. Those whose reputes are injured because of others' conspicuous consumption are driven to emulate. "Only individuals with an aberrant temperament", Veblen writes, "can in the long run retain their self-esteem in the face of the disesteem of their fellows."⁵²

Departing the rationality postulate, discerning an affective economy driven by narcissistic demands, the economic sphere looks less mechanistic and more aesthetic in nature.⁵³ We see the rhythm of economic life flowing not from narrow self-interest, but from idealisations of social life that appease narcissistic demands. *Homo economicus* is better conceived as *homo narcissus* or *homo aestheticus*. The aesthetic rules of the economy to which we adhere provide a sense of security and order. Our mastery of these rules, the aesthetics of family life, home ownership, consumption, professional development and investment, is driven by the glimmer of psychical repose.

The aesthetic of an economy can be costly, though, failing to provide narcissistic sustenance. In recent times, the entrenchment of neoliberalism's aesthetic has provided inadequate basis for transmuting the grandiose self. It offers idealisations with which many are unable to successfully merge. With unrealistic expectations of attaining neoliberalism's ideal, its subjects are perturbed by shame, contributing to narcissistic rage against others and the self.

Neoliberal Rage and the Tea Party

Kohutian self psychology can help to illuminate the socio-psychical dynamics of neoliberalism's resilience. It elucidates the successful reproduction of neoliberalism despite financial, psychological and social burdens imposed on some of its most dutiful subjects. Here it is argued that narcissistic injuries sustained under neoliberalism impair the potential for empathy and foster attachments to unrealistic idealisations, creating conditions ripe for narcissistic rage. For segments of the US population, particularly those drawn to populist conservatism, their vulnerability remains unacknowledged, and threats to their self-esteem precipitate a rage manifest in attacks on social welfare and demands for market fundamentalism.

In this section, focusing on the Tea Party movement as an exemplar of an arguably wider phenomenon, we see behaviours and attitudes indicative of regression along both poles of

⁵² Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 25.

⁵³ Claes Belfrage, "For a critical engagement with aesthetics in IPE: Revitalizing economic imagination in times of crisis", *International Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (2012), pp. 154-76.

Kohut's bipolar self. It is claimed that we witness evidence of a flight towards solipsistic grandiosity, contributing to the accentuation of dichotomous worldviews, an increasingly controlling disposition and intolerant views of rebellious objects. It is also suggested that along the idealising pole, we see the regression towards a compelling need to merge with omnipotent selfobjects to provide compensatory satisfaction.

Importantly, Kohut's theorisation allows understanding of the narcissistic conflicts of neoliberalism in a non-hypocritical fashion. We can begin to grasp the neoliberal subject's defensive and compensatory strategies, which impede healthier expressions of narcissism along the mirroring and idealising poles. Regression towards archaic grandiosity defends against vulnerabilities from exposure to market-mediated social life and in upholding the aesthetic of the good life. Allying oneself with utopian ideals of freedom and self-reliance provides a semblance of certainty and meaning. Simultaneously, these ideals offer immunity from concerns about the plight of others. Kohut's theorisation helps us to advance beyond explanations that attribute neoliberalism's rise to base instrumentalism or mass manipulation.

As Konings argues, suggestions of a Polanyian double movement following the financial crisis misconstrue how embedded neoliberalism is within the economy of affect.⁵⁴ Beliefs that the social and moral ravages of the unchecked market would, in seemingly mechanical fashion, usher in a political countermovement to re-impose public control were contradicted by the surge of neoliberal populism. Exemplifying this, the Tea Party expounded a market fundamentalism that provided an affective outlet for a significant element of conservative US citizens.⁵⁵ Though most US citizens agree on an active state role in reducing inequality within a free-market

⁵⁴ Martijn Konings, "Imagined Double Movements: Progressive Thought and the Specter of Neoliberal Populism", *Globalizations*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2012), pp. 609-22; Konings, *Emotional Logic of Capitalism*, op. cit.

⁵⁵ In 2010, polling data showed self-identified Tea Partiers as 18% of the population. See New York Times and CBS News, "Poll: National Survey of TPM Supporters", *The New York Times*, available: <<http://documents.nytimes.com/new-york-times-cbs-news-poll-national-survey-of-tea-party-supporters>> (accessed 11 November 2015). A Gallup poll showed support for the movement at 32% in 2010. See Jim Norman, "In U.S., Support for Tea Party Drops to New Low", *Gallup*, available: <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/186338/support-tea-party-drops-new-low.aspx>> (accessed 15 February 2016).

context,⁵⁶ the strong affective dynamic of conservative populism has helped impede the translation of this public opinion into policy.

Tea Party activism cannot be dismissed as false consciousness. The extreme policies it advocates, especially the anti-spending and anti-compromise positions that triggered debt-limit brinkmanship in 2011 and the government shutdown of 2013, threatened US capitalist interests.⁵⁷ Despite corporate funding, Tea Partiers' objectives did not neatly align with Harvey's view of neoliberalism as a project for restoring class power to ruling elites. Characterisations of the Tea Party as an "astroturf" campaign, lacking grassroots credentials, bought and manipulated by billionaires and corporate interests, and endorsed by Fox News pundits, discounted its genuine activism. Based on extensive interviews, Skocpol and Williamson reject these claims; they encountered Tea Partiers who invested significant time and energy traveling to rallies, attending regular meetings, arguing with officials and learning about local, state and national government.⁵⁸ Mostly older, white and middle class, they were not mere puppets of corporate elites, though there was grassroots contrivance in the movement's incipency.⁵⁹ Billionaire-funded political action committees and free-market advocacy organisations helped to create a platform for this activism, but did not control its "popular effervescence".⁶⁰

The defensive reaction of Tea Partiers to narcissistic injury is seen in their difficulties in empathising with groups with divergent views and backgrounds. Based on survey data of Tea Party movement supporters, Barreto et al. see a group characterised by strong out-group anxiety about changing US demographics.⁶¹ Tope et al. found that racial resentment was a key predictor of self-identified Tea Partiers, and that the movement served as an "outlet for mobilizing and

⁵⁶ Benjamin Page and Lawrence Jacobs, *Class War? What Americans Really Think about Economic Inequality* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁵⁷ Konings, "Imagined Double Movements", op. cit., p. 619.

⁵⁸ Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁵⁹ Clarence Lo, "Astroturf versus Grass Roots: Scenes from Early Tea Party Mobilization", in Lawrence Rosenthal and Christine Trost (eds.), *Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 98-130.

⁶⁰ Skocpol and Williamson, *The Tea Party*, op. cit., p. 12.

⁶¹ Matt Barreto, Betsy Cooper, Benjamin Gonzalez, Christopher Parker and Christopher Towler, "The Tea Party in the Age of Obama: Mainstream Conservatism or Out-Group Anxiety?", in Julian Go (ed.), *Rethinking Obama* (Bingley: Emerald, 2011), pp. 105-37.

expressing racialized grievances”.⁶² This outgroup resentment is manifest in double standards many hold regarding government regulation. Skocpol and Williamson found that while Tea Partiers abhor regulation and taxation of their property, they support government largesse in cracking down on immigrants and political and cultural opponents. At one meeting, they recount, an emotionally charged individual insisted that his group support a new law forcing police to check the immigration status of everyone they encountered, despite police informing him of the financial impracticalities.⁶³ Here, we see an inability to perceive the contradiction of denying others the dignity and freedom from intrusion that the Tea Partiers demand for themselves. Immigrant and racialised groups are objects threatening the narrative of selfhood Tea Partiers wish to sustain.

Tea partiers’ narcissistic rage manifests in response to growing challenges to whiteness largely in the form of colourblind racism. Whiteness, Lipsitz writes, is the “unmarked category against which difference is constructed”, it “never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations.”⁶⁴ Though the racism of the Tea Party has at times been overt, such as in its racist depictions of Barack Obama, it commonly operates through disavowal.⁶⁵ Tea Partiers espouse a nominal political equality that disregards historical injustices and exploitation by violent extra-economic means, and legitimates chronic inequalities. Bonilla-Silva explains that “colour-blind” racism, founded on principles of “abstract liberalism”, rationalises the lower status of minorities as the consequence of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena and imputed cultural characteristics.⁶⁶ Colour-blindness silences alternative political identities and discourses that threaten idealised narratives of “self-madness”. It imposes a discursive logic that obviates recourse to extra-economic explanations in accounting for the divergent fortunes of social groups. Sublimated narcissistic rage finds expression in enforcing others’ adherence to a disciplinary logic of responsabilisation,

⁶² Daniel Tope, Justin Pickett and Ted Chiricos, "Anti-minority attitudes and Tea Party Movement membership", *Social Science Research*, Vol. 51 (2015), pp. 322-37.

⁶³ Skocpol and Williamson, *The Tea Party*, op. cit., p. 57.

⁶⁴ George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006) p. 1.

⁶⁵ CNN, "Official apologizes for Obama chimpanzee email", *CNN*, available: <<http://edition.cnn.com/2011/POLITICS/04/19/california.apology/>> (accessed 19 March 2016).

⁶⁶ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006) p. 2.

which, for those afflicted by historical disaccumulation, entrenches their subordination. Indicative of this racialised rage is the vociferous opposition to the Affordable Care Act, popularly known as Obamacare, perceived by many opponents to fund healthcare for the “undeserving”⁶⁷.

Another key source of narcissistic injury for Tea Partiers is the challenge to their gender-invested conceptions of selfhood. Ideals of self-reliance and possessive individualism defining neoliberal subjectification are highly gendered, with manhood measured by one’s avoidance of dependence on others and the attainment of power and pecuniary success. Idealised conceptions of masculinity call for emotional containment—excepting anger in particular situations—which has been made more taxing in uncertain times. Following the financial crisis, government bailouts to cover reckless lending to groups viewed as irresponsible were taken as an insult to the sacrifices of many white men to perform their masculinity. Though Tea Party men have an above-average socio-economic standing, many of their constituents perceive a devaluation of their power in political, cultural, and status-based markets.⁶⁸

Confronting threats of a gendered self-sense, Tea Partiers, both men and women, cling to essentialised conceptions of gender. Burke argues that the movement works to reify inequalities, drawing on assumptions about men and women’s natural roles, and their substantial differences. Sarah Palin’s famous invocation in 2010 of the metaphor of “mama grizzlies”, who ferociously defend their cubs, provided a framing for the activism of Tea Party women within traditional conceptions of motherhood.⁶⁹ Though women have played a prominent role within the movement, constituting around 41% of its members and occupying high-rank positions, they have helped to underwrite idealised conceptions of masculinity rather than advance equality. Kimmel argues that there is an “aggrieved entitlement” of Tea Party women running parallel to the men’s: “they *want* their men to be the traditional heads of households, able to support their

⁶⁷ Knowles et al. found that implicit racial prejudice predicted opposition to this health care reform. See Eric Knowles, Brian Lowery and Rebecca Schaumberg, "Racial prejudice predicts opposition to Obama and his health care reform plan", *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (2010), pp. 420-23.

⁶⁸ William Parkin, Joshua Freilich and Steven Chermak, "Tea Party Mobilization and Power Devaluation", *Sociological Spectrum*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (2015), pp. 329-48.

⁶⁹ Meghan Burke, *Race, Gender, and Class in the Tea Party* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015).

families.”⁷⁰ Essentialist conceptions are employed in ways that cast as unnatural challenges to the existing gendered social order. As an example, Tea Party supporter William Davis Eaton inveighs against a radical feminist movement, what he labels “genderist”. He argues it is a “barren” program not about equality, but that aims “to remodel women into something other than what nature has determined women to be.”⁷¹

Neoliberalism did not create racial and gendered divisions, but it has become mutually-reinforcing with them. This owes to the historical underpinnings of popular neoliberalism in the United States. The 1960s, according to Wills, saw an awkward alliance against state intervention develop between advocates of staunch individualism, such as the Chicago School economists, joining with those holding authoritarian and conformist views, including religious fundamentalists, Southerners and traditionalists. These groups eventually blended together, forming what Connolly terms the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine, with corporate and evangelical sensibilities resonating together, forming a political assemblage thwarting democratic movements promoting economic security, equality and pluralism.⁷² For the individualists the aim was dismantling social welfare and reducing taxes, while for social conservatives the desire was for greater social control over their communities.⁷³ Free market rhetoric came together with social authoritarianism supporting traditional gender roles and racialised exclusions. So too, organised labour’s hostility to social movements in the 1960s lost it the opportunity to check dwindling union membership, and contributed to the right turn of labour and its decreasing concern with the welfare of average workers.⁷⁴

Today, as neoliberalism threatens self-cohesion among its adherents, the narcissistic rage it precipitates is frequently gendered and racialised. The frustrations of maintaining autonomy in uncertain economic times, rather than directed at big business and haute finance, find an outlet against those perceived as unproductive and irresponsible. The Tea Party movement, Berlet

⁷⁰ Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (New York, NY: Nation Books, 2013) p. 65.

⁷¹ William Davis Eaton, *Liberal Betrayal of America and the Tea Party Firestorm* (Oakland, OR: Elderberry Press, 2010) p. 45.

⁷² William E. Connolly, "The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine", *Political Theory*, Vol. 33, No. 6 (2005), pp. 869-86.

⁷³ Garry Wills, *Nixon Agonistes: The Crisis of the Self-Made Man* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1970) p. 555.

⁷⁴ Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers, *Right Turn: The Decline of the Democrats and the Future of American Politics* (New York, NY: Hill and Lang, 1986) p. 84.

argues, draws on a “producerist” morality that scapegoats the left and minorities. The narrative helps to resist the mobilisation of the state to deal with economic crisis, and deflects attention from implicated elites.⁷⁵ So too, in advocating political equality and individual autonomy, neoliberalism forestalls contestation of structural inequalities underpinning whiteness and patriarchy. Neoliberalism’s ahistoricism nurtures feelings of solipsistic grandiosity and inhibits empathy, with individuals invested in narratives of their own self-making and self-sufficiency, while advantages conferred by racial and gendered privilege are unrecognised.

Accompanying regressions along the mirroring pole, with unacknowledged narcissistic vulnerabilities fuelling hostile projection against others, are regressions along the idealising pole, leading to efforts to merge with powerful objects. In conditions of uncertainty, and lacking positive mirroring with which to confront their precariousness, Tea Partiers have variously sought security in idealised symbolic selfobjects such as the free market and the American way of life, the nation and its founders, and the Christian Bible.

Tea Partiers find compensatory selfobjects in mythologised readings of the United States’ creation. The founding fathers are perceived as omniscient selfobjects with whom those in the movement can unite. Lepore refers to this as “historical fundamentalism”, with “the founding” depicted as ageless and sacred, and documents like the Constitution read akin to religious texts, containing transcendent, immediate truths.⁷⁶ Exemplifying this is W. Cleon Skousen’s *The 5000 Year Leap*, which argued that the US Constitution derives from divinely ordained natural law.⁷⁷ Historical fundamentalism creates selfobjects beyond reproach; discrepancies between the founders’ views and those of the Tea Partiers, such as their religious differences, are elided. Given the investment made in these idealised selfobjects, the academic study of history, with more rigorous standards of evidence and methods of analysis based on scepticism, is perceived as politically motivated and profane.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Chip Berlet, “Reframing Populist Resentments in the Tea Party Movement”, in *Steep*, op. cit., pp. 47-66.

⁷⁶ Jill Lepore, *The Whites of Their Eyes: the Tea Party's Revolution and the Battle over American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁷⁷ Skousen’s book became a best seller in 2009, promoted by former Fox News conservative commentator Glenn Beck. See W. Cleon Skousen, *The 5000 Year Leap: A Miracle that Changed the World* (Malta, ID: National Center for Constitutional Studies, 2006).

⁷⁸ Lepore, *The Whites of Their Eyes*, op. cit., p. 16.

So too the free market is an idealised selfobject for many Tea Partiers. Though most are middle class, as noted by Postel, they see their interests aligned with those of multimillionaires and billionaires. Taxes on the wealthy, though unlikely to have financial consequences for most Tea Partiers, are a threat to the American Dream to which they aspire.⁷⁹ Eighty per cent of the movement's supporters oppose tax increases for families earning over \$250,000,⁸⁰ though 45% made less than \$50,000 annually.⁸¹ Skocpol and Williamson encountered Tea Partiers professing themselves as "proud capitalists", with many being small business owners who cast their lot with the wealthiest CEOs.⁸² Expressive of this was how polls during the 2016 Republican presidential primary race showed a majority of Tea Partiers supporting billionaire Donald Trump, compared with the limited support for Ted Cruz, the presumptive Tea Party candidate.⁸³ Combining with the idealisation of the United States' sacred founding is "capitalist originalism", a popular Tea Party theme that holds the country was founded as a capitalist state.⁸⁴ The quasi-religious qualities of the selfobject of the market is indicated by most Tea Partiers' belief in capitalism's consistency with Christian values.⁸⁵ They thus seek to merge themselves with this idealised selfobject, resonating with Konings view on the purifying effects of submitting to the discipline of money.

The group regression evidenced in the Tea Party movement has created conditions propitious for neoliberalism's reproduction. Though neoliberal subjectification increases

⁷⁹ Charles Postel, *"The Tea Party in Historical Perspective: A Conservative Response to a Crisis of Political Economy"*, in *Steep*, op. cit., pp. 25-46.

⁸⁰ Abby Scher and Chip Berlet, "The Tea Party Moment", in Nella Van Dyke and David S. Meyer (eds.), *Understanding the Tea Party Movement* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. 104.

⁸¹ Gallup, "Tea Partiers Are Fairly Mainstream in Their Demographics", *Gallup*, available: <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/127181/tea-partiers-fairly-mainstream-demographics.aspx>> (accessed 20 November 2015).

⁸² Skocpol and Williamson, *The Tea Party*, op. cit., p. 57.

⁸³ CNN and ORC International, "CNN/ORC International Poll", *CNN* (29 February 2016), available: <<http://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2016/images/02/29/rel4a.-.2016.primaries.pdf>> (accessed 26 May 2016).

⁸⁴ Paul Street and Anthony Dimaggio, *Crashing the Tea Party: Mass Media and the Campaign to Remake American Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

⁸⁵ 56% of Tea Partiers view them as consistent, compared to 36% of the general public. See PRRI, "Plurality of Americans Believe Capitalism at Odds with Christian Values", *Public Religion Research Institute* (April 2011), available: <<http://publicreligion.org/research/2011/04/plurality-of-americans-believe-capitalism-at-odds-with-christian-values/>> (accessed 2 November 2015).

vulnerability and contributes to narcissistic injury, the resulting rage is directed at those who challenge the idealisation of the free market and the privileges of whiteness and patriarchy. Though many Tea Partiers are not neoliberal ideologues, with most against cuts to the two largest government spending programs, Social Security and Medicare,⁸⁶ their idealisations of the market, business elites and individual autonomy position them as an effective bulwark defending neoliberal governance. Understanding the regressions evidenced in this popular conservatism helps us to advance beyond wishful notions that a double movement, by *deus ex machina*, will usher in an era of greater social justice with the next crisis. Accordingly, as discussed in the conclusion, addressing neoliberalism's persistence and attendant rage requires a different approach to politics.

Overcoming Neoliberalism

Years since the onset of the global financial crisis, optimism about neoliberalism's decline now seems whimsical. Despite vocal pockets of resistance to neoliberal discipline, no groundswell materialised to challenge the free-market project and revive Keynesian inspired redistributive politics. Popular neoliberalism and austerity took hold. Despite opprobrium directed towards bankers and financiers, in the United States no high-level executives were prosecuted for abetting the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Adherence to neoliberalism was doubled-down, with stricter discipline imposed on many social groups that unduly bore the financial meltdown's consequences.

This article has attempted to shed light on the complex socio-psychical dynamics sustaining neoliberalism's reproduction, arguing that chronic narcissistic injury and narcissistic rage help to maintain neoliberalism's trajectory. While neoliberalism, through expropriation of public wealth, subjects us to a harsh social division of labour that depletes the creative and political capacities to resist it,⁸⁷ it also relies on forestalling the attainment of more stable narcissistic configurations. Paraphrasing Berlant, cruel optimism keeps individuals enthralled by neoliberalism's impossible aesthetic of selfhood. With this goal ever elusive, neoliberalism produces, according to Layton, fragile self-states, defined by oscillations between grandiosity

⁸⁶ Lisa Disch, "Tea Party Movement: The American 'Precariat'?", *Representation*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (2011), pp. 123-35.

⁸⁷ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for emphasising this point.

and self-deprecation.⁸⁸ Threats to this grandiosity, as seen with the Tea Party, contribute to stricter obedience to norms of possessive individualism as a means of exacting revenge on others. Not dissimilar to the other-control attained through the protestant ethic, the self-sacrifice of dutifully adhering to a neoliberal aesthetic undermines others' possibilities of living differently. Self-abnegation, as seen in efforts to defund the Affordable Care Act, becomes a way of inflicting injury on resented others. Simultaneously, adherence to neoliberalism's asceticism is a form of aggression against the self, against those elements that betray one's grandiosity. This dynamic is captured by Konings notion of redemptive austerity, of the purifying effects individuals seek in negotiating themselves through the market's operations.

Kohut's theorisation contributes to and benefits from the understanding of neoliberal subjectivity offered by performativity and Foucauldian-inspired approaches. Performativity, entailing the reiteration of social conventions, plays a key role in normalising neoliberal selfhood, constraining political consciousness and imagination. So too, performativity provides a basis for regulating and expressing emotions. Performativity is not, though, an independent variable; understanding the emotional resonance of a performance or speech act requires grasping its contingency in a broader affective economy. In a context of fragile self states, mirroring and idealising needs can amplify a performance's significance. In relation to governmentality studies, self psychology's theorisation of narcissism contributes to understanding practical rationalities, the conduct of conducts. As D'Aoust argues, many governmentality scholars, in focusing on rationality, recreate the very divide between rationality and emotion that the approach seeks to overcome. Omitted from such scholarship is how "feelings as varied as love, anxiety, anger and desire are integral to neoliberal processes."⁸⁹ Self psychology contributes to moving beyond the instrumentalisation of emotion, understanding how subjectification is mediated by affective economies. At the same time, performativity and governmentality studies help to localise the unique manifestations of narcissistic tensions, for as

⁸⁸ Lynne Layton, "Grandiosity, Neoliberalism, and Neoconservatism", *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, Vol. 34, No. 5 (2014), pp. 463-74.

⁸⁹ Anne-Marie D'Aoust, "Ties that Bind? Engaging Emotions, Governmentality and Neoliberalism: Introduction to the Special Issue", *Global Society*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2014), p. 269.

Kohut acknowledged, the self ultimately takes shape in a contextually-specific matrix of selfobjects.⁹⁰

Based on a Kohutian reading, confronting the rage induced by neoliberal subjectification with counter-aggression is likely to prove unproductive, failing to provide the basis for successfully transmuting narcissism. Countering neoliberal rage entails creating conditions for empathic responsiveness with those ensnared in its logic, and encouraging new idealisations and identifications.

In a study of the ideological conflict over the Affordable Care Act, Bendersky found that affirming an opponent's status fostered more conciliatory attitudes and a willingness to sacrifice one's own outcomes. The affirmation of status, she suggests, "likely buffers opponents against the identity-threat they would incur for compromising on an ideological issue, thereby reducing their defensive intransigence."⁹¹ In Kohutian terms, providing mirroring support for an adversary, affirming their status, can encourage conditions for empathic responsiveness by lessening narcissistic threats.

Layton argues that neoliberalism normalises the repudiation of our vulnerability, dampening our ability to relate to the suffering of others. Drawing on philosopher Paul Hoggett, she suggests that neoliberalism defines empathy as "a one-way state in which the empathizer is figured as separate from the person who suffers, safely distant from the sufferer's pain."⁹² Countering neoliberalism's negative social consequences requires identifications that foster appreciation of our vulnerability. Doing so allows recognition of harm inflicted on others in the pursuit of manifest selfhood.

Ultimately, advancing beyond neoliberalism entails therapeutically-attuned politics that promote conditions for optimal frustration, allowing individuals to better cope with the vulnerabilities inciting neoliberal rage. Hope for a catharsis arising out of future crisis discounts the investment many make in neoliberal subjectivities; further instability could create traumatic frustration, eventuating in harsher manifestations of neoliberal rage. Overcoming neoliberalism

⁹⁰ Heinz Kohut, *"The Psychoanalyst and the Historian"*, in *Self Psychology and the Humanities*, op. cit., p. 218.

⁹¹ Corinne Bendersky, "Resolving ideological conflicts by affirming opponents' status: The Tea Party, Obamacare and the 2013 government shutdown", *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 53 (2014), p. 167.

⁹² Lynne Layton, "Who's Responsible? Our Mutual Implication in Each Other's Suffering", *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2009), p. 109.

requires recognition of the sense of powerlessness that provokes flights towards grandiosity, and attachments to harmful idealisations. A therapeutically-attuned politics recognises how institutions, especially the market, serve as affective technologies that regulate our narcissistic configurations. It recognises that enacting substantive social change and redistribution require furnishing new narratives of society and the self. It entails narratives and identifications that minimise provoking the humiliation and shame of those who sacrifice so much in the pursuit of neoliberal selfhood, and coax them towards more cohesive self-states.

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